

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USMISSION GENEVA

UNCLAS STATE 112319

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM DACCA DATED MAY 1, 1978 SENT SEC-
STATE WASHDC INFO CALCUTTA, COLOMBO, ISLAMABAD, KATHMANDU,
NEW DELHI, RANGOON, CINCPAC FOR POLAD IS REPEATED TO YOU:
QUOTE

UNCLAS DACCA 2695

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

DEPARTMENT ALSO PASS AID/OFDA

E.O. 11652 : N/A

TAGS : PBOR, BM, BG

SUBJECT : PRESS TREATMENT OF ARAKANESE MUSLIM ISSUE

REF : DACCA 2641

1. IN THE FOUR DAYS SINCE SENDING REFTEL, THE BANGLADESH PRESS,
BOTH ENGLISH AND VERNACULAR, HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO THE
INFLUX OF ARAKANESE MUSLIMS INTO BANGLADESH. THE MAY 1ST EDITION
OF THE BANGLADESH TIMES, QUOTING OFFICIAL SOURCES, ESTIMATED THAT
OVER 40,000 REFUGEES HAVE NOW CROSSED THE BORDER, BUT THE TIMES
SUGGESTED THAT THE FIGURE MAY BE CLOSER TO 50,000. THE MAJORITY
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OF THE REFUGEES ARE REPORTEDLY OLD MEN AND CHILDREN, WITH THE
YOUNGER MEN AND WOMEN HELD BACK BY THE BURMESE BORDER AUTHORI-
TIES. SEPARATE STORIES OF BURMESE OFFICIAL BRUTALITY HAVE BEEN
IN THE PRESS EACH DAY, INCLUDING FIRST-PERSON INTERVIEWS BY A
CORRESPONDENT OF THE TIMES.

2. IN A SEPARATE SHORT NOTE MAY 1ST, THE OFFICIAL BANGLADESH

NEWS AGENCY, BSS, REPORTED THAT BURMESE AUTHORITIES OPENED FIRE THE PREVIOUS DAY ON A REFUGEE CAMP INSIDE BANGLADESH TERRITORY. NO INJURIES WERE REPORTED IN THAT CLASH. AN APRIL 30 ARTICLE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT 50 PEOPLE HAD REPORTEDLY DIED OF BULLET AND STAB WOUNDS RECEIVED BEFORE CROSSING THE BORDER.

3. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS FROM APRIL 29, THE BDG CALLED IN THE BURMESE AMBASSADOR TO PROTEST THE INFLUX AND SUGGESTED THAT HE TOUR THE AREA USING BDG FACILITIES. THE AMBASSADOR'S REPLY WAS NOT NOTED. IN THE SAME ISSUE, APPEALS FROM VARIOUS MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS IN DACCA WERE PRINTED, MOST OF WHICH CALLED ON EITHER THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS OR THE UN HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. ITTEFAQ, THE LARGEST BENGALI DAILY, REPORTED MAY 1ST THAT A TELEGRAM FROM THE BD-US FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY HAD URGED PRESIDENT CARTER'S INTERVENTION TO STOP THE EVICTION OF THE BURMESE MUSLIMS. (COMMENT: THE EMBASSY HAS NOT RECEIVED THE TELEGRAM. END COMMENT.)

4. EDITORIALS HAVE CALLED ON THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO SETTLE THE TROUBLE SO THAT THE REFUGEES CAN RETURN TO THEIR HOMES. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, NO MENTION HAS YET BEEN MADE OF THE STRAIN ON BANGLADESH RESOURCES IN THE ATTEMPT TO COPE WITH THE INFLUX. AS OF MAY 1ST, THE BANGLADESH RED CROSS, ACCORDING TO THE TIMES, HAD DISTRIBUTED TONS OF MILK POWDER, BISCUITS, MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND BLANKETS, BUT THE SUPPLY HAD FALLEN SHORT OF REQUIREMENTS. NO MEDICAL EPIDEMIC HAS YET BEEN REPORTED.

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